

11 October 2019

Mr Robert Seely MBE MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Seely,

Thank you for your enquiry about Wightlink's preparations for winter 2019/20.

The winter season has particular challenges, not only due to weather but also as we take each of our eight vessels in turn through an intensive refit and inspection programme, including drydocking, using facilities in Portsmouth, Southampton, Dunkirk and Falmouth. Wight Sky has already successfully completed her refit and Wight Light is now in Falmouth for hers. Our refit programme continues until April 2020.

Our aim is to deliver more than 99% reliability on all three of our routes throughout the year, in other words fewer than one in 100 cancelled sailings for all reasons including weather (in September we achieved 99.5%). Last winter our Portsmouth-Ryde Pier FastCats achieved the 99% target but we missed our target in January on Portsmouth-Fishbourne. Unfortunately we also missed that target from November to January on Lymington-Yarmouth because of our well documented Volvo engine issues. Colleagues and suppliers have worked extremely hard all year to resolve these issues and as a result we have had no significant service disruption due to engine failures since January.

We are also undertaking a number of additional actions at our ports as we prepare for adverse weather. Our gritting machines have recently been upgraded and, between October and March, colleagues at all ports take and log temperature checks - if it drops below two degrees we start gritting. During extreme cold weather we take extra steps to reduce the risk of water pipes freezing, especially on Ryde Pier. We are also rostering Night Engineers to ensure that the vessels that are laid up overnight are warmed up and ready to go each morning etc.

Safety is, of course, our overriding priority. At times of extreme weather our Captains may decide to delay or cancel a sailing on the grounds of safety such as poor visibility. However, we realise that Islanders are dependent on us too for essential travel at all times of the year and all of us at Wightlink strive to maximise the reliability of the service throughout the winter and beyond.

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You have asked me if our 22:45 FastCat service from Portsmouth can be delayed for customers on late-arriving trains from London. Yes, we frequently do wait for up to five minutes, based on information passed to us by South Western Railway (SWR). The issue with waiting longer is that we have a boat with many other people on board. They have arrived on time and are expecting to depart on time, some will need to make a tight connection at Ryde onto an Island Line train at 23:19.

We appreciate that trains are sometimes severely delayed. To cater for these customers, a bus meets our 23:59 car ferry from Portsmouth at Fishbourne and provides a 'backstop' service for Islanders to get back to Ryde. The welcome investment in Island Line could provide us with an opportunity to look again at connection times at Ryde and we will certainly discuss that with SWR when the time comes.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely



**Keith Greenfield**  
**Chief Executive**